

## **CLAIMS**

1. A method of facilitating messaging outside of a defined user group, comprising steps of:
  - 5 reserving a plurality of routing codes for exchanging messages with users outside of a defined group of users;
    - exchanging messages between a first user and a second user, wherein said second user is outside of said defined group;
    - assigning one of said routing codes to a message directed to said second user by said first user; and
    - temporarily assigning one of said routing codes to said second user's personal identifier so that said first user can easily reply to said second user without originating a new message.
  - 15 2. The method of Claim 1, wherein said defined group comprises a buddy group defined by said first user.
    3. The method of Claim 2, wherein said first user comprises a user of a mobile unit device, and wherein said second user is outside of said buddy group.
    - 20 4. The method of Claim 3, wherein said messages comprise instant messages.
    5. The method of Claim 4, wherein said step of exchanging messages comprises steps of:

composing a message for said second user by said mobile user, said message including at least said second user's personal identifier in body of said message;

5 sending said message to a routing code assigned to an 'unlisted' function on said mobile device;

receiving said message at an instant messaging system;

capturing said second user's personal identifier by said instant messaging system;

assigning a routing code to said second user's personal identifier; and

10 sending said message to said second user; and

optionally returning notice of said assignment to said mobile user, so that future messaging is facilitated.

6. The method of Claim 4, wherein said step of exchanging messages

15 comprises steps of:

sending a message to said mobile user by said second user;

receiving said message at said instant messaging system;

capturing said second user's personal identifier by an instant messaging system;

20 assigning a routing code to said second user's personal identifier; and

sending said message to said mobile user.

7. The method of Claim 4, wherein said step of exchanging messages

comprises steps of:

- receiving a message at said mobile unit from said second user, wherein said second user's personal identifier has previously been associated with a second routing code; and
- replying to said received message by said mobile user by means of an automated 'reply' function on said mobile unit.
8. The method of Claim 1, wherein assignment of a routing code to said second user persists for the duration of a user session.
- 10 9. The method of Claim 1, wherein routing codes for assignment to a second user are recycled during a user session if the number of second users exceeds the routing codes available for second users.
10. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
- 15 preventing occurrence of a condition wherein different second users are associated with the same routing code.
11. The method of Claim 10, wherein said step of preventing comprises any of the steps of:
- 20 delaying delivery of a message from said second user pending confirmation of said mobile user's interest in receiving said message; and
- providing sufficient routing codes that recycling of codes is unlikely to be necessary.
- 25 12. A computer program product, said computer program product comprising a tangible medium with computer-readable code embodied thereon, said computer-

readable code including code means for performing the steps of a method for facilitating messaging outside of pre-defined user group, the method comprising steps of:

reserving a plurality of routing codes for exchanging messages with users

5 outside of a defined group of users;

exchanging messages between a first user and a second user, wherein said second user is outside of said defined group;

assigning one of said routing codes to a message directed to said second user by said first user; and

10 temporarily assigning one of said routing codes to said second user's personal identifier so that said first user can easily reply to said second user without originating a new message.

13. The computer program product of Claim 12, wherein said defined group  
15 comprises a buddy group defined by said first user.

14. The computer program product of Claim 13, wherein said first user comprises a user of a mobile unit device, and wherein said second user is outside of said buddy group.

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15. The computer program product of Claim 14, wherein said messages comprise instant messages.

16. The computer program product of Claim 15, wherein said step of exchanging  
25 messages comprises steps of:

composing a message for said second user by said mobile user, said message including at least said second user's personal identifier in body of said message;

5 sending said message to a routing code assigned to an 'unlisted' function on said mobile device;

receiving said message at an instant messaging system;

capturing said second user's personal identifier by said instant messaging system;

assigning a routing code to said second user's personal identifier; and

10 sending said message to said second user; and

optionally returning notice of said assignment to said mobile user, so that future messaging is facilitated.

17. The computer program product of Claim 15, wherein said step of exchanging 15 messages comprises steps of:

sending a message to said mobile user by said second user;

receiving said message at said instant messaging system;

capturing said second user's personal identifier by an instant messaging system;

20 assigning a routing code to said second user's personal identifier; and sending said message to said mobile user.

18. The computer program product of Claim 15, wherein said step of exchanging messages comprises steps of:

receiving a message at said mobile unit from said second user, wherein said second user's personal identifier has previously been associated with a second routing code; and

replying to said received message by said mobile user by means of an

5 automated 'reply' function on said mobile unit.

19. The computer program product of Claim 12, wherein assignment of a routing code to said second user persists for the duration of a user session.

10 20. The computer program product of Claim 12, wherein routing codes for assignment to a second user are recycled during a user session if the number of second users exceeds the routing codes available for second users.

21. The computer program product of Claim 12, further comprising the step of:

15 preventing occurrence of a condition wherein different second users are associated with the same routing code.

22. The computer program product of Claim 10, wherein said step of preventing comprises any of the steps of:

20 delaying delivery of a message from said second user pending confirmation of said mobile user's interest in receiving said message; and

providing sufficient routing codes that recycling of codes is unlikely to be necessary.

25 23. An apparatus for facilitating messaging outside of a defined group comprising:

- a plurality of reserved routing codes for exchanging messages with users outside of said defined group;
- means for exchanging messages between a first user and a second user, said second user not included in said defined group;
- 5 means for assigning one of said routing codes to a message directed to said second user by said first user; and
- means for temporarily assigning one of said routing codes to said second user's personal identifier so that said first user can easily reply to said second user without originating a new message.
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24. The apparatus of Claim 23, wherein said defined group comprises a buddy group defined by said first user.
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25. The apparatus of Claim 24, wherein said first user comprises a user of a mobile unit device, and wherein said second user is outside of said buddy group.
26. The apparatus of Claim 25, wherein said messages comprise instant messages.
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27. The apparatus of Claim 26, wherein said means for exchanging messages comprises means for:
- composing a message for said second user by said mobile user, said message including said second user's personal identifier in body of said message;
- sending said message to a routing code assigned to an 'unlisted' function on
- 25 said mobile device;
- receiving said message at an instant messaging system;

capturing said second user's personal identifier by said instant messaging system;

assigning a routing code to said second user's personal identifier;

sending said message to said second user; and

5       optionally returning notice of said assignment to said mobile user, so that future messaging is facilitated.

28.     The apparatus of Claim 27, wherein said means for exchanging messages comprises means for:

10     sending a message to said mobile user by said second user;  
receiving said message at said instant messaging system;  
capturing said second user's personal identifier by said instant messaging system;

assigning a routing code to said second user's personal identifier; and

15     sending said message to said mobile user.

29.     The apparatus of Claim 26, wherein said means for exchanging messages comprises means for:

20     receiving a message at said mobile unit from said second user, wherein said second user's personal identifier has previously been associated with a routing code;  
and

replying to said received message by said mobile user by means of an automated 'reply' function on said mobile unit.

25     30.     The apparatus of Claim 23, wherein assignment of a routing code to said second user persists for the duration of a user session.

31. The apparatus of Claim 23, wherein routing codes for assignment to said second user are recycled during a user session if the number of second users exceeds the available second routing codes.

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32. The apparatus of Claim 23, further comprising means for:  
preventing occurrence of a condition wherein different second users are associated with the same routing code.

10 33. The apparatus of Claim 32, wherein said means for preventing comprises means for any of:

delaying delivery of a message from a second user pending confirmation of said mobile user's interest in receiving said message; and

providing sufficient routing codes for assignment to said second users that

15 recycling of codes is unlikely to be necessary

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